

Madam Speaker, I rise today in support of the Senate Amendments to H.R. 4783, the *Claims Resolution Act*, and Cobell and Pigford II settlements now included.

In 1996, Indian plaintiffs, including Eloise Cobell, filed a class action suit against the federal government for mismanagement of Indian trust land and other assets. During the 13 years that followed, courts repeatedly ruled in favor of the plaintiffs assertions that the government violated its trust responsibility, did not provide accurate accounting, and did not provide Indians with their share of the revenue from the Individual Indian Money (IIM) accounts. One year ago, on December 8, 2009, the plaintiffs and the U.S. Interior and Justice Departments announced a \$3.4 billion settlement for this long-running suit.

This settlement should have been approved by Congress in a timely manner. Too many deadlines for Congressional action have passed this year, requiring the settlement parties to keep extending the approval deadline. Tribal members whose trust accounts were mismanaged have waited too long for compensation. Already this year, I have voted for funding the settlement twice. Both times the funding passed the House only to have the funds stripped by Republican obstruction in the Senate. Finally, on November 19, the Senate passed the approval for the settlement in the Senate Amendments to H.R. 4783, the *Claims Resolution Act*, and sent it back to us.

In addition, I applaud the \$1.15 billion settlement of the Pigford II class action lawsuit for finally rectifying an injustice that is an inexcusable stain on our nation's history. In 1910, African American farmers owned 15 million acres of land. Now, that number has dwindled to two million acres. This settlement represents an important step forward towards ensuring the fair and equal treatment of all farmers, regardless of their race.

These injustices have been perpetrated for decades, and today the House has the opportunity to vote again to uphold our end of the trust relationship with all American Indians and Alaska Natives and settle discrimination claims made by African American farmers.

Though these funds come decades too late for many of the people affected, it is important for the U.S. government to recognize the many past wrongs inflicted on the indigenous people of this country and black farmers who have been discriminated against. This is a vote that will make a difference in hundreds of thousands of lives, finally beginning to right some wrongs.

For far too long, American Indian trust account holders and African American farmers have had to wait for justice. Today there will be justice, but it will not come without a fight against bigotry, intolerance, and the champions of inequality. The fact that some Republican voices, including a Member from Minnesota, are calling the settlement with African American farmers a fraud and a scam reflects the very racial intolerance and discrimination that are at the root of this settlement.

With this legislation, the federal government can honor its commitment in a fiscally responsible manner. The funding is completely offset. The Senate passed it by unanimous consent. If it

passes the House today, it will go directly to the President for his signature. I urge my colleagues to vote yes on the Senate Amendments to H.R. 4783 because American Indians and African American farmers have waited long enough.

With that, Madam Speaker, I yield back my time.